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By-Weiss, Gerhard H.

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German-American cultural contrasts and contrasts between different German regions are illustrated through reference to fairy tales, folk heroes, regional jokes and anecdotes. Examples of legendary figures, fairy tales, and jokes are provided with suggestions on their use to illuminate the German culture and subcultures. The footnotes provide suggestions for further source material. (AF)

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Folktale and Folklore—Useful Cultural Tools for Teachers of German

By Gerhard H. Weiss,
University of Minnesota

Editorial Advisor:
Jermaine D. Arendt,
Minneapolis Public Schools

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FOLKTALE AND FOLKLORE
USEFUL CULTURAL TOOLS FOR TEACHERS OF GERMAN

A recent article by Genelle Grant Morain[1] suggests the use of folklore as a fresh approach to the teaching of culture. The author limits herself to the teaching of French culture, but her suggestions are of interest also to teachers of other languages.

Professor Morain's approach can be expanded to apply to the study of contrasting cultures and regional peculiarities. (This will be particularly useful in studying the culture of Germany, which consists of many distinct regional subcultures.) It can also include the highly revealing cultural myths and regional "folk jokes."

It is the purpose of this paper to indicate how this approach can be used successfully in the classroom. We shall select our examples from German cultures, but much of what we say will be applicable to other cultures. Similar methods could be used also to contrast such closely related (and yet so different) cultures as those of England and the United States, or of France and French Canada.

One of the prime concerns for any foreign language teacher is to develop the ability to demonstrate cultural contrasts without implying that "the other culture" is quaint, or ripe for the museum. Attempts by some teachers to demonstrate German culture, for example, by exhibiting beer mugs or short leather pants are as superficial as the standard European slur of the gum-chewing, cigar-smoking American who has his feet on the table. This is not a study of cultural contrasts; this is mere pedagogical ignorance and incompetence.

We can do better when we turn to such materials as books for children, which are readily at hand and meaningful in both cultures. These books are excellent sources, because they are deeply rooted in the foreign culture and at the same time simple enough to be generally comprehensible. Tales common both to the foreign culture and to our own are ideal, because we can study their similarities and differences. My favorite has always been the folk fairy tale, since it has usually been rather freely translated, and since it poses few linguistic difficulties. The free translation is a product of the demand for cultural adjustment. The story is, so to speak, absorbed. The way in which it has been absorbed becomes, in itself, a fascinating study.

Let us take as an example "Little Red Riding Hood," a simple story that all our students know. To demonstrate our point, we shall choose neither the original version in Grimm's Kinder und Hausmärchen, nor a sophisticated translation. We shall choose a children's edition, such as the one published by Engelbert Dessart in Mainz, Germany, and compare it with some of the American editions sold in our supermarkets and drug stores,[2] since these are the editions most influenced by our present culture. In class, we read first the English and then the German version. The differences are immediately obvious, reflecting the attitudes and concepts of the two cultures. Since, however, the basic story is one and the same, and the outcome is identical, the student learns that the same thing can be viewed with different eyes and that one approach is no more correct than the other.

What are some of the basic differences? Immediately, our students will observe that the German grandmother receives wine, while the American one is fed either milk or

grapejuice. The American cultural concept of alcohol as sin has no counterpart in Germany. When a young girl, as sweet and innocent as Little Red Riding Hood, is shown carrying wine to her good grandmother, we may conclude that the drinking of wine is a matter of course and no moral judgment is implied. Indeed, an enlightened teacher can point to the fact that in the German version the wine is brought to improve the old lady's health. In other words, it is "good for you," an attribute that is frequently heard in Germany to this day. Wine, like beer, is an integral part of German culture.

In one of the American texts, Red Riding Hood meets her animal friends in the forest,[3] an incident totally foreign to the German counterpart. Here we see the typical American middle-class mythology of a "world of friends," a concept strongly fostered by our schools and churches. But the German child learns early to recognize the hostility of the world. In this framework the wolf becomes a basic, almost natural, element, while in the American environment he is an exception, an absurd intruder. In the same American version, the wolf eats neither grandmother nor Red Riding Hood. In the German, both are consumed with considerable relish. We have here a clear example of the American tendency to shy away from death as a reality and a constant possibility. In the German culture death is accepted much more matter-of-factly. Cemeteries and the cultivation of graves are common in Germany, in contrast to the American custom of the funeral parlor, with its elaborate embalming techniques. America is obsessed with life, Germany is preoccupied with death. This, of course, is a generalization, but one that has a considerable degree of truth, as reflected in German lyric poetry.

Fairy tales can be used to demonstrate many aspects of German culture. But we must be careful not to overinterpret. The cruelty in these stories, for example, is not necessarily typical of the German character. On the other hand, the fact that most of the agents for good or ill are women may well have its source not only in pagan concepts, but also in the fact that the father figure was traditionally more remote, while the mother was close at hand and charged with the discipline of the child. It also belies the prevalent idea that women were second in importance in the German home. After all, we never hear of an evil stepfather in German fairy tales!

In some Märchen we encounter a concept similar to the so-called American dream, indicating that both cultures appreciate the little man who rises to great heights. Examples are the story of the little tailor who marries the king's daughter, and the tale of Cinderella. When students wonder why so many fairy tales end with the marriage of the king's daughter and the inheritance of "half the kingdom," the teacher can refer them to the ancient Germanic law of heredity which prescribed the inheritance of an equal portion of land by each of the children of a given family, to such historic events as the division of the empire of Charlemagne, and to prevailing custom in the division of German farm land.

Legends and sagas will yield less satisfactory results for cultural interpretations. They are too antiquated and allow us a glimpse only of the spirit of the past. The fact that the Nibelungenlied reflects certain historic events, such as the battle between the Burgundians and the Huns, is of secondary importance to the teacher facing a high school or lower college class. To such a teacher, these folk materials are important only when later generations begin to give them mystical significance, when they become a national myth. All cultures have such "national myths." For us in America they include the figures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and the glorious concepts of freedom. The German culture has the "Nibelungentreue" and Siegfried's courage; the concept of the

faithful German wife (cf. Tacitus and Walter von der Vogelweide), usually in contrast to the less faithful women of other countries; the national hero of liberation, Herman the Cheruscan; and above all, the moody, brooding Faust. Again, the cultural contrast is apparent. The American heroes are politically oriented, worshipped because they attempted to build a better world. The Germans made no attempt to change their environment, they were part of a society which they could not conceive as changeable. The American hero is a man of action; the German hero merely dreams of action. This is why the Germans to this day like to identify themselves with Faust, and why no teacher can avoid discussing this ambivalent spirit. Going back to the medieval sources of the Faust myth will not give us much help in understanding modern German culture. We must see what the myth has come to mean in our time. Today Faust represents the eternally seeking, deeply troubled soul, whose complex dreams are never realized and who is not to be measured by normal standards. His pact with the devil has moved him beyond good and evil, he is the epitome of the intellectual, but he is, at the same time, governed more by emotions than by reason. He is, in many ways, the prototype of the Gebildete Mensch, a concept precious to modern German culture. It is significant also that the natural myth of Faust concentrates entirely on the figure created by Goethe in the opening monologue of the first part of the drama, and that the Faust of the last scenes of the second part is entirely ignored. Indeed, the creation of a free land for free people seems to many anti-climactic, a let-down from the lofty heights of the world of dreams.

German culture, as we noted earlier, is a conglomeration of numerous subcultures. Even in present day Germany much that may parade as "typisch deutsch" is, in reality, more Swabian, Bavarian, or North German. The local identity of the South Germans has been better preserved than that of the North Germans. The two southernmost German-speaking territories, Austria and Switzerland, have become independent political units, and, to this day, Bavaria has retained a high degree of individuality, making it the Texas of Germany. The recent attempt by a Bavarian legislator to mark the cars of his state with the code "BY" in place of the standard international symbol "D" is typical of the tradition of Bavarian thought.

How can we demonstrate this particularism to our students? Fairy tales and national myths will be of little help, even though some scholars have done much to sort and classify regional Märchen.[4] We find more helpful, however, the regional joke or anecdote which, usually in a few lines, often tells us more about a regional character or custom than a long descriptive essay. A good example is Swabia. Outside their own territory, Swabians are considered somewhat stubborn and individualistic, perhaps a bit behind the times, and certainly endowed with a great tendency to dream and to speculate about God and the World. In the rest of the country, they are treated with a benign tolerance[5] and are frequently the butts of jokes. The story of the seven Swabians who went out together to seek adventure and fled when they encountered a rabbit is a case in point. They are impractical, these Swabians, and their "native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." To those who deny such an intellectual interpretation, the Swabians have traditionally appeared as slow, timid, and a bit dumb. The Swabians, however, take this criticism in stride. Their self-esteem (and their objectivity) raises them above such defamation. They respond with the little ditty:

Der Schiller und der Hegel
Der Uhland und der Hauff,
Das ist bei uns die Regel,
Das fällt uns gar nicht auf.

Their self-confidence can also be found in the story of Genesis, as the Swabians like to tell it, according to which God had made a perfect scale model of the world, prior to the act of creation. This model was so excellent that the Good Lord did not want to discard it. He placed it on earth and called it Württemberg.[6] He populated it with angels and thus this area is still close to Him and as close to heaven on earth as any mortal can come.

Regional jokes are plentiful in Germany and appear in many forms.[7] They are, even in their modern versions, continuations of the folk tales and of the Schwank of bygone days. Their author is usually anonymous, they are based predominantly on an oral tradition, and the skill of the narrator does much to embellish them. Many of the stories center around characters who have become archetypes for the region. They are the successors to Till Eulenspiegel and a host of other medieval characters. Some of the best known today are Tünnes and Schäl in Cologne, Klein Erna in Hamburg, and Graf Bobby or Baron Poldi in Vienna. The Tünnes and Schäl jokes show the relaxed humor of Cologne, a spirit that is reminiscent of Till Eulenspiegel. For example:

> Tünnes appears with a ladies' bike.
> "Where did you get it?"
> "From my girl."
> "How?"
> "We were biking together in the forest, and when we stopped for coffee she put her arms around me and said: 'You can have anything from me you want,' . . . so, I took her bike."

The broad, relaxed humor of the Rhineland is quite different from the more rapid, "pragmatic" humor of North Germany, as we find it, for example, in the Klein Erna stories. What could be more pragmatic and less "gemütlich" than Klein Erna's march to the Olsdorf cemetery near Hamburg, on a cold and slippery winter day? The little girl carries her uncle's ashes, and after many a slip on the ice, Auntie finally cries out: "Nu aber Ssluss mit die Pietät, nu wird gesstreut."

The Viennese Baron Bobby, in turn, represents all the charm and urbanity of Austria's capital. It is an urbanity which is quite "weltfremd" and exists, so to speak, in spite of itself. The many Graf Bobby stories, especially when told with proper Viennese embellishments, can illustrate much that is typical of the spirit of Vienna – a refusal to acknowledge the pressures (or even the existence) of modern life, a concern for the unessential, and a rejection of practicality and efficiency as a moral virtue. The following is an example:

> Graf Bobby sees a worker carrying a heavy grandfather clock on his back. The worker is obviously suffering from the heavy load. Bobby looks at him in amazement, shakes his head in compassion, and finally goes to the man. He points to his own wrist watch and exclaims: "Schauns amal her, dös müssens sich kaufen! Dös ist praktisch!"[8]

Even contrasts in culture can become the subject of anecdotes. There are many stories of Berliners in Munich, or Bavarians in Berlin. One of the most succinct tales is that of the Bavarian forest workers who move from breakfast to coffee break to lunch and fail to remove a fallen tree from the roadway. The exasperated North German, who has been watching them, finally lifts the tree and shoves it to the side, only to hear the workers

say, with a shrug of their shoulders, "Tjö, mit Gewalt!" North German efficiency and South German casualness are beautifully illustrated. While the North believes in work for work's sake, the South has a much greater appreciation of life and its many little pleasures.

Since 1945, a new type of regional joke has sprung up in Germany. It is closely related to the political joke and has as its target the political, social, and economic conditions in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (East Germany).[9] It is still part of the folk tradition, because it develops overnight, uses old themes and motifs (often jokes that were current during the Nazi period), and because its authors are not known. Again, these jokes make a very good source for the presentation of contemporary German culture. They describe with sharpness and wit the conditions of the Germans behind the iron curtain. One example of many:

> Ulbricht visits Mao. He asks him how many enemies of communism there are in China. Mao reports that recent intelligence counts approximately 17 million. Ulbricht sighs with relief: "I am glad to hear that, because we don't have any more than that either." (17 million is the population of East Germany.)

We have come to the end of our discussion. Much could be added – the folk song, for example, and the large body of trivial literature. Reading texts for schools are another valuable source. The teacher with imagination and the ability to recognize cultural implications will find an abundance of material if only he cares to look. He will find, as we have found, that folklore and folk tales in their varied forms make useful tools for the presentation of a foreign culture – a presentation which can be not only informative, but entertaining as well.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"French Folklore: A Fresh Approach to the Teaching of Culture," French Review XLI (April 1968), pp. 675-681. By the same author, see also French Culture: The Folklore Facet, ERIC Focus Reports on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Number 9 (New York, 1969).

[2]I found especially useful for our purposes the "Little Golden Book" edition (New York: Golden Press, 1948) and the "Tell-A-Tale" edition (Racine: Whitman Publishing Co., no date).

[3]"Tell-A-Tale" edition.

[4]Ralph S. Boggs, "A Comparative Survey of the Folktales of Ten Peoples," Finnish Folklore Communications, (Helsinki: Suomatainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1930) 93. Samuel Singer, Schweizer Märchen, 2 vols. Bern, 1903, 1906; K. Schulte-Kemminghausen, ed., Märchen aux deutschen Landschaften (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag). This is a most useful series which began its publication in 1961, under the auspices of the "Gesellschaft zur Pflege der Märchenforschung."

[5]August Lämmle, Schwäbisches und Allzuschwäbisches (Tübinger: Alemannen Verlag, 1936).

[6]This story was related to me by a Swabian minister.

[7]For an excellent discussion, see Herbert Schöffler, Kleine Geographie des deutschen Witzes (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Rupprecht, 1955).

[8]Literarische Kleinkunst, ed. William Malten (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 54. (This is a very useful textbook in the Harper's Deutsche Bibliothek series and contains many little stories similar to the one quoted here.)

[9]For an excellent collection of these jokes, see Kurt Hirche, Der "braune" und der "rote" Witz (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1964), pp. 203-302.